



December 14, 2001
Volume 2001, Issue 39

Inside this Issue:

Safety Tips for Toys and Decorations for the Holidays

Tips to Help Avoid Holiday Depression

Holidays Can Still be Happy Without Alcohol

State Holiday Closings



The Pipeline

Editor's Note:

The following news releases are provided by the Cabinet for Health Services. I hope you find this helpful during this holiday season.

Safety Tips for Toys and Decorations for the Holidays

The holiday season is here and shoppers are hitting the malls in search of toys, lights, and decorations. The Kentucky Cabinet for Health Services wants to pass along a few guidelines to make sure this holiday season is a safe one.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission requires toy manufacturers to meet safety standards and to label certain toys that could be a hazard for younger children. Parents should look for these labels in toys and gifts their children receive.

Here are a few safety tips to use when purchasing toys for small children:

- Read the label to select toys that suit the age, abilities, skills, and interest level of the child.
- For children who still place objects in their mouths, avoid toys with small parts and balls with a diameter of one and three-quarters of an inch or less. These could be a choking hazard. Children under age 8 can choke or suffocate on uninflated or broken balloons.
- Watch for strings that are more than 12 inches in length. They could be a strangulation hazard for small children.
- Look for sturdy toy construction. The eyes, nose and other small parts on toys and stuffed animals should be securely fastened on the toy. And be sure to avoid toys that have or could easily break to expose sharp edges.
- Immediately discard plastic wrappings which can cause suffocation, before they become deadly playthings. Also discard

other items used in packaging such as twist ties, screws, and Styrofoam pieces.

- Before buying a toy or allowing your child to play with a toy, read the instructions carefully. If the toy is appropriate for your child, show him or her how to use it properly.

Each year, holiday lights and decorations are responsible for about 400 fires, resulting in 20 deaths, 70 injuries and more than \$15 million in property loss and damage in this country. The Cabinet for Health Services suggests the following tips for holiday decorations and lights:

- Look for "Fire Resistant" labels before purchasing artificial trees and decorations. Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.
- Live trees should be fresh. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces, heaters, stoves, and radiators. Because heated rooms dry live trees out rapidly, be sure the tree stand is filled with water.
- Use only lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, which indicates conformance with safety standards.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and throw out damaged sets.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- Use only indoor lights inside and outdoor lights outside and never

more than three standard size sets per extension cord.

- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks. You can purchase hooks made specifically for outside lights.
- For added electric shock protection, plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable outdoor GFCIs can be purchased where electrical supplies are sold. GFCIs can be installed permanently to household circuits by a qualified electrician.
- When leaving the house or going to bed always turn off all lights and extinguish all candles/open flames. Never use lighted candles on trees or near other evergreens and always use non-flammable holders, and place candles in an open area where they will not be knocked down.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to prevent a child's swallowing or inhaling small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.
- Do not burn wrapping paper in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.

For more information, see these websites: www.safekids.org <<http://www.safekids.org>> or www.aap.org <<http://www.aap.org>> or www.cpsc.gov <<http://www.cpsc.gov>>

Tips to Help Avoid Holiday Depression

“Happy Holidays!” These are the words we often hear this time of year. However, grief, loneliness, and stress are often intensified during the holidays, which can result in feelings of

unhappiness instead of joy. Unrealistic expectations of a picture-perfect, Norman Rockwell Christmas; over-commercialization; and the added pressures of shopping, gift giving and cooking may further accent these feelings.

Although many people experience feelings of depression and anxiety during the holiday season, these feelings may be even more prevalent this year due to the recent events like the Sept. 11 terrorist bombing, anthrax scares, the war in Afghanistan, and the recession.

“It is normal to experience feelings of anxiety in reaction to a stressful event such as the holidays, and these reactions may be further compounded by the recent national tragedies,” said Margaret Pennington, commissioner of the state’s Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services.

If you think that you are experiencing the holiday blues or want to try to avoid them this year, here are some tips to help you cope.

- Keep expectations manageable by setting realistic goals; pace yourself and organize your time. Make a list of things you need to do. Then take a look at your list and see which things must be done. Is there anything you can put aside for a while or let go of completely? Can someone else do or help you do things on the list?
- Realize that the holiday season does not automatically banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely. Allow yourself room for these feelings and then decide what you can do to move beyond them. For example, sometimes getting out of the house is helpful. Also, every now and then turn off the television and radio for a while and listen to a favorite compact disc, read or spend time on a favorite hobby.
- Life is full of changes. Don’t be disappointed if your holiday isn’t exactly like the past. Each holiday season is different and can be enjoyed in a unique way. Try

different ways to celebrate the holidays; create new traditions. Find small ways to help others, as it may help ease your own negative feelings.

- Enjoy holiday activities that are free, such as driving or walking around to look at holiday decorations. Go window-shopping or visit with others. Check your local newspaper or listen to the radio or television for free activities you might enjoy.
- Avoid using alcohol and other drugs. Substances may block the pain for a while, but they will keep you from dealing with your pain and healing.
- Take care of your mind and body. While holiday foods are rich and yummy and you can enjoy them, try to do so in moderation. A little exercise can help to lift depression and also can help you sleep better.
- Spend time with people who are supportive and care about you. Reach out to make new friends or contact someone with whom you have lost touch. Others may be experiencing the blues as well and appreciate your contacting them.
- Make time for yourself. Don’t spend all of your time providing activities for your family and friends. Enjoy this time of year in your own way; be good to yourself, even if only for a few minutes.
- If you have experienced a recent loss, accept that your grief may be intensified. Allow yourself to have these feelings of loss, mourn, have a good cry. Then talk with others, establish new traditions, and get some physical activity. Go outside and breathe some fresh air and take a look at nature or telephone someone you know.
- Think about what makes you feel grateful and what gives you hope. Then write them down and turn to

your list whenever you are going through a difficult time.

- Most of all - remember to breathe, literally. Sometimes we get so caught up in life's events that we forget to breathe properly. Stop every now and then, close your eyes and take deep, slow breaths until you feel calmer.

If you think your feelings of depression and anxiety are more than just *unhappy holidays*, remember that it can be treated. Consider contacting your doctor, clergyman, or a counselor. Information is also available at your local community mental health center.

Comprehensive Care Crisis Line for the Frankfort Area

BLUEGRASS REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH/MENTAL RETARDATION BOARD INC. -- Anderson, Bourbon, Boyle, Clark, Estill, Fayette, Franklin, Garrard, Harrison, Jessamine, Lincoln, Madison, Mercer, Nicholas, Powell, Scott, Woodford. 800-928-8000 (after 5 p.m.) or 859-253-2737 (8 a.m.-5 p.m., M-F).

Holidays Can Still be Happy Without Alcohol

Alcohol is often a welcome guest at holiday gatherings, but isn't always cause to celebrate. Holidays can be especially dangerous because people often celebrate by over-drinking, making themselves susceptible to alcohol-related troubles such as drunken driving and ruined family celebrations.

Impaired driving can occur with very low blood alcohol percentages. At least 50 percent of all holiday traffic fatalities nationally involve alcohol, according to *Mothers Against Drunk Driving*. Kentucky State Police statistics from the 2000 Christmas holidays show that 50 individuals were injured and one killed in automobile crashes where alcohol was a factor. According to *Healthy Kentuckians 2010*, a health prevention report compiled by the Cabinet for Health Services, underage drinking kills six times more young people every year than all illicit drugs combined.

There is an alcohol-related traffic fatality every 32 minutes and an alcohol-related traffic injury every two minutes in the United States, according to Western Insurance Information Service. Two out of every five Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash during their lifetimes. And, contrary to popular belief, 87 percent of drivers with a high blood alcohol content in fatal crashes have had no alcohol convictions during the past three years.

"Most people realize alcohol doesn't make a party. Overindulgence can really put a damper on the celebration, especially with the recent change in the DUI law which says that a blood alcohol level of .08 indicates illegal intoxication," according to Mike Townsend, director of the Division of Substance Abuse in the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services.

So, having a safe and sober holiday may be the best gift of all. Parties can be festive without alcoholic beverages. Hosts can serve alternatives such as non-alcoholic beer, punches, soft drinks or flavored coffee and tea. Creating other holiday traditions such as caroling, cooking special dishes, playing favorite games and other entertainment prevent people from overindulging. Establishing traditions that don't center on alcohol with children early in life may help keep them away from a dangerous pattern as they grow into adulthood.

"Guests shouldn't feel embarrassed by refusing a drink and hosts shouldn't feel obligated to serve alcohol. People who are driving, taking medications, recovering alcoholics, pregnant or young should not drink alcohol, period," said Townsend.

Townsend said that people tend to forget that alcohol is a drug, a depressant. It can affect people in a variety of ways and, by dampening inhibitions, may lead people to say or do things they normally would not if sober. Drinking alcohol can lead to irresponsible behavior and unwise

choices, such as unsafe sex or getting into fights.

The following tips can help partygoers reduce the risk of alcohol use, if they choose to drink:

- Drink slowly and avoid gulping an alcoholic beverage. On the average, the body can only metabolize one drink an hour.
- Eat food with your alcoholic beverage to slow consumption.
- Realize that alcohol metabolism is based on the size of the individual. For example, a 200-pound person will be less affected than a 110-pound person who consumes the same quantity of alcohol over the same period of time.
- Remember that wine coolers are not soft drinks. They have as high an alcoholic content as beer.
- Don't drink and drive or even ride with someone who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- If you have a problem with alcohol or are a recovering alcoholic, decide how to handle the temptation to drink before going to a party.

If you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol, help can be obtained by calling 1-888-729-8028, a toll-free prevention hotline sponsored by the Division of Substance Abuse, or by contacting your community mental health center.

State Holiday Closings

State offices will be closed on the following days:

Christmas Holiday: Monday & Tuesday, December 24-25, 2001

New Year Holiday: Monday & Tuesday, December 31, 2001 - January 1, 2002

